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THE MEDICINES OF MEDICINE.

—
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Paper Read at the 35th Annual Meeting
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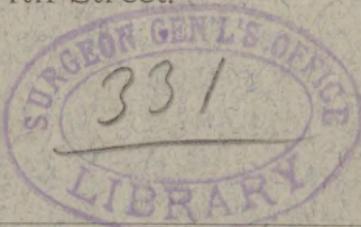
BY

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THE

MEDICINES OF MEDICINE.*

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EMLEN PAINTER, Ph. G.

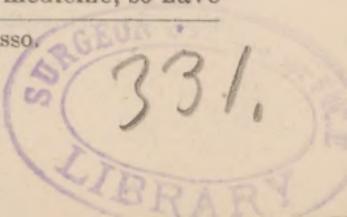
This article was written with the intention of contributing it to a medical journal, but I have since decided to first bring the matter before the Pharmacists of the country, and I now have the honor to present the paper to this representative body.

The object of this article is to throw some light if possible upon one of the most important adjuncts to the healing art—the medicines prescribed by the doctors of medicine—not to abuse, however, in any degree the confidence of the medical practitioner reposed in the pharmacist, nor to criticise the prescriptions of any physician.

I desire only to review the subject from a professional and scientific standpoint, to advance a progressive theory, and to point out the quagmires yawning in every direction to entrap the unwary. For obvious reasons the pharmacist has a superior point of observation from which to view this subject, otherwise I would hesitate to put forward my views and criticisms on a matter so important to medicine.

From a review of prescriptions of leading medical men in different localities for a period of 20 years and more, it is an observable fact that in proportion as scientific research has eliminated the different distinct principles of drugs employed in medicine, so have

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their separate principles grown more and more in use, and the drug itself and galenical preparations of the crude drug are less and less prescribed. It does not require a prophet to foretell that it is but a question of time when the separate and definite principles only will be employed, and that the inert, objectionable, vague and varying substances will be discarded. It is also my conviction that eventually, through developments in scientific research, all remedial agents (other than food products) will be presented in their simplest form, and that preparations of crude drugs and mixtures, as primary articles of medicine, will become obsolete. I look upon any obstacle in the way of development in this direction as a serious drawback to medical and pharmaceutical knowledge, and a still greater detriment to suffering humanity.

As evolution proceeds in this course, the more learned and skillful of the medical fraternity will make their selection from the simples to suit the individual case under treatment, like the true marksman who singles out his game and with unerring aim brings it down. There will then follow all grades, down to the medical man who prescribes by culling over old prescriptions, or, if the ready-made prescriptions which now flood the market are not then extinct, he may prescribe one of these (concocted possibly by a wholesale drug firm or a grocer) as, with an old-fashioned blunderbuss, he fires at the flock.

In this evolution above referred to, the pharmacist must also take an active part, those in the vanguard, with the aid of the chemist, will devote themselves assiduously to separating the chaff from the grain; they will provide the means to enable the prescriber to make his selection of simples for whatsoever form of administration desired. And from this class of pharmacists, as of the physicians, all grades will be found down to the dispenser who will send away a legitimate prescription because of the lack of knowledge or facilities for dispensing it, and who would be willing to content himself with handing out, or counting out, factory-made prescriptions, or the selling of other cure-all nostrums.

Although this great work of resolving remedial agents into their separate principles possessing distinct or different physiological

properties goes on, and untold advantages to medicine and pharmacy are accruing from it, yet the benefits are lessened and the work seriously retarded ; medicine and pharmacy are demoralized, and besides saddled with a stupendous burden by the manipulators of these remedies, who force their mixtures upon us as primary medicinal agents.

The magnitude of this abuse, the absurdity of it and its demoralizing effect can perhaps better be shown by first reciting a few brief statistics.

There are in the United States not less than 160 different so-called "manufacturers of pharmaceutical preparations," who in reality, for the most part, are but mere manipulators and mixers of drugs. At least 25 per cent. of this number have offices in New York, and a still larger percentage send out their drummers to the medical men in this vicinity to distribute samples, to extol their wares and to urge upon the physician to designate their particular "make" in prescribing.

These 40 odd manufacturers include in their lists of preparations not less than the total sum of 36,500 mixtures, each of which is designated by some particular name, and so prescribed.

The dispenser is expected to be prepared to furnish any one of this list of proprietary articles at a moment's notice, and assuming that on the average five new ones are called for every day, it would take him just 20 years to have handled the whole stock, by which time some of it certainly would have gotten a trifle stale.

How absurd to expect the pharmacist to be burdened with this immense quantity of useless truck, or to expect the physician to tax his mind with the consideration of it. Yet there is not a single day in this great city but that hundreds and hundreds of these articles are prescribed and dispensed. I find upon examining prescription files of recent date that a large percentage of the prescriptions are for proprietary articles. If it were not for scientific research, which still goes on, notwithstanding this hindrance ; if it were not for the new discoveries and the new lights which occasionally flash out even in the midst of all this débris, it would seem that we were drifting back to an infinitely worse state of empiricism than prevailed in the mediæval ages.

Let us now review a few of these factory-made prescriptions, making the selection from those which are most frequently prescribed by professional men, and therefore presumably the best of the whole list.

Of the pills (comprising the greatest number of mixture) the following prescription is one very frequently seen :

Rx		Formula.
Pil. aloin strych et belladon. comp.		Aloin gr. $\frac{1}{8}$
(W. H. S. & Co's) No. xxiv.		Strych. gr. $\frac{1}{60}$
Sig. one or two a day.		Ext. bellad. gr. $\frac{1}{8}$
		Ext. cas. sag. gr. $\frac{1}{2}$

or the name within the bracket may be written P. D. & Co., McK. & R., W. R. W. & Co., B. & C., W. & H., H. T. & Co., T. & Co., H. B. & W., W. & B., M. & Co., S. & D., or other makers innumerable. These pills are offered dressed up in various coats, and in various forms. Now, what is there in this formula that the pharmacist and dispenser cannot prepare it? What is there in it that bushels of these pills are required to be kept on the shelves of the pharmacist, in the warehouses and in the wholesale drug houses, getting old and dry and hard, and otherwise unfit for dispensing? What is there in it that manufacturers by the score should claim a proprietary right therein insomuch as to claim that those of their particular make are not only equal to the best, but are superior to all others? And many of these manufacturers further add insult to injury by cautioning the prescriber to look out for substitutions by the unprincipled druggist, to examine the coating or the shape of the pills dispensed and catch the rascal in the act who would dare compound the prescription himself, or to put up Brown's make when Green's make was ordered.

The thousand and one other formulæ for pills are open to the same criticism, others, indeed, standing in a worse light, and savoring still more of the clap-trap nostrum business, being known and prescribed as a specific for some ailment, as, for instance, W's Antisyphilitic Pills, T's Antidyspeptic Pills, M's Rheumatic Pills, etc., etc.

Of the elixirs, wines and syrups, a single one will serve as an illustration, as they all come in the same category :

R. Elix. Ferri, Quin. et Strych. Phos.

(.....) $\frac{3}{2}$ iv.

Sig. One teaspoonful 3 times a day.

This elixir is probably the one (of the multitude) most frequently prescribed, and there being no recognized strength or formula for this preparation known to the manufacturers, each produces an article peculiar to himself. These elixirs vary in alkaloidal strength, and have a still greater variation in the iron compound. The most popular one, perhaps, although purporting to be an elixir of phosphates, has been proven to contain no phosphate at all, and to be also deficient in the alkaloids claimed to be contained in it. A solution of citrate of iron and quinine in simple elixir, with a solution of strychnine added, will make a preparation so near like the one referred to, that it is doubtful if an analyst even could determine a difference. This latter combination makes an elegant and stable preparation, and no doubt one of therapeutical value, but would not the prescriber be better served by ordering the quantity of cit. iron and quinine and strychnine desired, to be dissolved in a given quantity of simple elixir ? The iron phosphates in solution are very prone to change, especially on exposure to the light. If the physician, however, desires a phosphate of iron with this combination of alkaloids, of standard and definite strength, I would respectfully refer him to the N. Y. & B. Formulary for this, as well as for other kindred preparations.

I do not mean to imply, however, that all of these factory-made preparations are not true to name or to formula, but I do say that very many of them are not, and that the physician who prescribes them is in some degree groping in the dark.

There is still another class of articles approaching more closely even to the secret remedies which are so justly tabooed by the medical profession, and yet these articles are prescribed throughout the length and breadth of our land, although they are more insidious and damaging in their character than the worst of the other nostrums. The authors of these preparations not only claim pro-

prietorship in them, but also in their very names, and, notwithstanding this, men of science will prescribe them who would be shocked at the thought of prescibirng "Bear's Cough Syrup" or Bonnet's Sarsaparilla. If they would but give this class of articles a second thought, they could not fail to see how unprofessional they are, and how serious a clog to scientific advancement.

The names of these articles, as in the other instances, are legion ; they generally include the name of their promoters or some fictitious name selected, or else their authors coin new names for old articles, and lay claim to the whole business as exclusively their property and as primary articles of medicine.

As an example of this class, take "Bromidia," which is daily prescribed by medical men, and used largely by the laity as well. In the advertisements of this article I observe the formula is given, "Every fluid dram contains 15 grains each of pure chloral hydrat. and purified brom. pot., and $\frac{1}{8}$ grain each of gen. imp. ext. cannabis ind. and hyoscyam."

"Dose, $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 fluid dram in water or syrup every hour until sleep is produced."

The "indications" given are almost as numerous as will be found on the yellow wrappers of the cure-all remedies so liberally advertised in the daily papers, and the only real difference is, this article is advertised for the eye of the medical profession, the other to the general public ; they both point out the symptoms of ailments they are intended to relieve or cure, and they are equally unprofessional. I know it is claimed for this article that it is not a secret preparation. The proprietors give away the formula and retain for themselves nothing but the hollow name, upon which they spend thousands upon thousands of dollars in advertising : how magnanimously generous, and, I presume, it is to repay them for such generosity that medical men prescribe "Bromidia" and like articles. If the preparation be true to formula given, what other excuse can physicians have for prescribing a proprietary medicine ? If the indications be such that the prescriber desires his patient to take 15 grains of pure chloral hydrate, 15 grains of purified bromide of potassium and $\frac{1}{8}$ grain each of genuine imported extract of cannabis indica

and *hyoscyamus*, why does he not write his prescription for it instead of prescribing a "patent medicine"? One may answer that he cannot carry the formula in his head, that this combination has had a satisfactory effect, and he desires to use it again. Well, then, I would respectfully suggest that he write for elix. chloral comp., after the formula for "Bromidia," and have it so dispensed.

If, on the other hand, the article is not true to formula given, then it is a deception and a fraud, and should on this score be obliterated from the vocabulary of medicines, as well as all others of its ilk. In this connection I would point out the important fact, that the medicinal properties of "genuine imported extract of *cannabis indica*" reside in a volatile oil and green resin, which are not held in solution in a liquid no stronger in spirits than "Bromidia," and the presence of 20 per cent. or more of a salt further interferes with solution, and, moreover, if it were in solution or even suspended, the preparation would have a greenish tint.

This article was not singled out for any particular reason, further than that, under my observation, among the preparations of this class, it led in the frequency of prescriptions for it. There are scores of other like preparations which might just as well have been selected.

To conclude, I contend that the whole of these 36,500 proprietary articles above referred to are totally unworthy the distinction of being prescribed by medical gentlemen, that they are directly at variance with scientific progress, that their promoters have contributed absolutely nothing of value, and that had they never existed both medicine and pharmacy would have this day reached a higher plane in the developments of science.

These so-called manufacturers of pharmaceutical preparations have simply gathered together a lot of old prescriptions of different physicians, and these with the mixing together of sundry principles, which their peers have eliminated, constitute their whole stock in trade. In this long list of preparations they have originated nothing, except their grand scheme of appropriating the work of others, perverting its application, and by a system of advertising, saddling it upon medicine and pharmacy, which bear the burden,

and these schemes enjoy the pecuniary benefits. The load is becoming more and more burdensome, and I feel that we have submitted to the imposition long enough, and that we should rise up and drive the enemy from their stronghold, which can readily be done by concerted action.

Theirs is a garrison whose commissary stores are in the hands of their natural enemy. Cut off their supplies and they will very quickly "seek other fields and pastures new."

NEW YORK, June, 1886.

